Excel Learning Trust

Trust Board

Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 19th May 2025 9.30am held at Trust Office – Woodthorpe Primary School

Present:	Ian Wiggins	Chair of Trustees
	Donna Smith	Trustee & Vice Chair
In attendance:	Mark Hassack	CEO
	Michael Gidley	Chief Finance Officer
	Katie Dent	Chief Operating Officer
	Zoe French	Director of Trust Services
	Sophie Triffitt	Clerk to the Board of Trustees

1 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND CHANGES TO BUSINESS INTEREST FORMS *(PREVIOUSLY ISSUED)*

Absence

2.1 Apologies were received and accepted for Natalie Wong and Martyn Sibley.

2.2 Frankie Haynes was not present at the meeting.

2.3 It was confirmed that the meeting was not quorate so no resolutions could be confirmed in the meeting.

Declarations of Interest

2.4 Trustees were reminded to keep their business interest submissions up to date throughout the year.

3 CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR APPOINTMENTS

3.1 Mr Wiggins confirmed he would stand for another term as Chair.

3.2 Ms Smith confirmed she would stand for another term as Vice Chair.

3.3 The clerk confirmed there had been no other nominations.

3.4 **For approval:** The decision for Chair and Vice Chair appointments would be circulated for written agreement.

Chair and Vice Chair Election Procedure (previously issued)

3.5 **For approval:** The approval of the election procedure would be circulated for written agreement.

4 CEO UPDATE (previously issued)

4.1 The CEO highlighted that despite moving in the right direction attendance remained a concern particularly for SEND (Special Education Needs and Disabilities) and FSM (Free School Meal) cohorts at secondary school. The DfE had announced Attendance and Behaviour Advisor Hubs, and it was expected that York High would be allocated to a hub and would welcome the expertise. The CEO explained that York High had a data rich systems driven approach to targeting attendance but there was a need to be assured that the approaches were being driven effectively.

4.2 The CEO reported that Inspire Academy awaited registration.

4.3 The change to the school day at York High and Millthorpe had been confirmed.

4.4 The National Institute of Teaching were in the final stages of putting a proposal together and confirmed they would be in contact WC 19th May 2025.

4.5 The Trust was investigating accrediting courses for training and the potential of buying a licence to offer Team Teach.

4.6 Interviews for Assistant Principal at York High were scheduled for Wednesday 21st May 2025. There had been 17 applications and it had not been advertised through TES as the contract was closed at a cost saving of £32k with a different and cheaper training provider being secured and free recruitment adverts placed through the DfE. **A Trustee requested that the new approach for advertising vacancies was monitored to ensure it did not narrow applicants in terms of DEI.** The CEO noted that there was the option to pay a one off £2k recruitment advertisement fee to use TES if needed.

4.7 Interviews for Vice Principal to include SENCO at Carr Junior were scheduled for Thursday 22nd May 2025.

4.8 The internal adverts for Vice Principal and Assistant Principal at Woodthorpe would be live next half term.

4.9 **A Trustee noted that it had been interesting to see the feedback from the Artificial Intelligence trial.**

4.10 **A Trustee noted the article in the local press on York High suspensions that referred to historic data from the 2023/24 academic year.** The CEO informed trustees that the two secondary schools were the only two secondary schools in York to reduce suspension data this year.

4.11 It was confirmed there were no decisions needed on the CEO Report.

Excel Learning Trust, Company Number 10067116,

Registered Office: Woodthorpe Primary School, Summerfield Road, Woodthorpe, York, YO24 2RU

5 SEND AND SAFEGUARDING REPORT

SEND (previously issued)

5.1 **A Trustee noted that the report was informative, provided useful context and evidenced the level of work being done in the Trust and in support of the city.**

Safeguarding (previously issued)

5.2 **A Trustee suggested that it would be useful to have per capita data for the youth related statistics to enable effective comparison.**

5.3 **A Trustee asked if any of the youth related incidents were filtering through the schools.** The CEO explained that some of the behaviour would cross over into school but generally the behaviour presented differently in school through general defiance, a couple of incidents of vaping and flags raised on the internet filtering and monitoring systems. These inform the personal development curriculum offer.

5.4 **A Trustee asked if there was an effective relationship with the Police.** The CEO explained that there was surface level engagement with Police representatives running sessions in school on specific subject matters. The CEO noted that on a recent break in at Millthorpe it would have helped to have some engagement from the Police for a collaborative approach but because the decision was taken not to press charges they did not engage. Millthorpe would be delivering their own intervention, but Police input would have been valuable.

5.5 **Trustees recorded thanks to the Director of SEND & Safeguarding for the reports.**

6 HR UPDATE

Gender Pay Gap Report (previously issued)

6.1 The COO confirmed that the report had been presented at committee level and had been published in line with the requirement. **A Trustee noted that the gender pay gap had reduced.**

Job Evaluation Report (previously issued)

6.2 **A Trustee noted that it was a significant piece of work, and it was useful to have the involvement of the external software system.**

6.3 **A Trustee asked how staff engagement was being approached.** The COO explained that the report had a link to the project plan which included communication stages. The project would be launched with union representatives at the JNCC meeting on 12th June 2025 and staff would be involved early in finalising job descriptions which would support communication. **Trustees agreed that regular communication and updates at Trust Board level would be appropriate.**

6.4 **A Trustee questioned if three weeks to feedback on job descriptions was adequate.** The COO noted that timeframe may need to be extended.

6.5 **A Trustee asked what the approach would be for people who were graded lower.** The COO confirmed there would be an appeals process and expected a vast majority of roles to be at the right level with a handful of anomalies. The LGA have standardised job descriptions for the JE scheme which would be helped to establish consistency across the Trust.

6.6 **A Trustee requested that policy decisions on job evaluation were consulted on with trustees.**

6.7 **A Trustee requested that communication be fluid throughout the process and consideration be given to the timing and clarity of communications either side of holidays.**

6.8 **For approval:** The approval of the job evaluation project to begin would be circulated for written agreement.

Recruitment Data (previously issued)

6.9 **A Trustee asked if DEI data for appointments was tracked.** The COO explained that there was no trust wide HR system to record that data for employees, a new trust wide MIS system would be in place from March 2026 which would support tracking of that information. **A Trustee suggested that it would be good to have that data to ensure no unconscious bias for appointments.**

6.10 **A Trustee noted the younger age profile and asked if that was linked to the Universities.** The COO noted that there was a spike in older applicants last year and could depend on the roles advertised. There were a couple of primary teacher vacancies which had high application rates and if these include applications for Early Career Teacher posts that could impact the profile.

7 ESTATES AND IT

Capital Projects (previously issued)

7.1 The capital projects had previously been approved by e mail.

Health and Safety (previously issued)

7.2 **A Trustee recognised that Scarcroft had moved into the green zone.** The CEO noted that the Compliance Officer had started to work across all schools in the Trust.

IT Update (previously issued)

7.3 **A Trustee noted that it was positive that the Trust IT Manager had made a proactive start.**

8 FINANCE UPDATE

Monitoring (previously issued)

8.1 The CFO reported that they had been advised that National Insurance funding would be circa £24k less than the overall cost increase and did not take into account the associated increase in the cleaning contract cost.

8.2 **A Trustee asked if there was any appeal process on the NI formula calculation which meant the NI increase was not fully funded.** The CFO confirmed not but he would raise the concerns that the increase was not fully funded and that the short notice period created difficulties in forecasting at the meeting with the DfE finance representatives in June 2025.

8.3 The CFO reported that he had allowed for a higher support staff pay award in budget plans as a 3.2% proposal was currently with unions. The CFO expected a circa £11k impact to the budget.

8.4 The CFO reported that the overall reserve was circa £900k (3.8%) and the in-year surplus was £476k.

School Resource Management Self-Assessment (previously issued)

8.5 **Trustees noted that the process was undertaken and filed with the DfE.**

Risk Register

8.6 **A Trustee questioned the Director of Trust Services being recorded as the owner of every risk and asked for the Risk Register to reflect the owner/s.**

8.7 The CFO noted that schools had individual risks recorded in iAMCompliant which should be reported termly to LGBs.

9 TRUST CATERING CONTRACT TENDER

9.1 A Trustee asked for assurance that the process was run in line with policy. The CFO confirmed it was and an external consultancy was used.

9.2 It was confirmed that the proposal would cover all schools.

9.3 **A Trustee suggested a communication for changes of the two schools that would have staff TUPE transfer over to an external provider.** The CEO agreed that communications would be shared with parents to confirm personnel would not change.

9.4 It was confirmed that the contract proposal needed approval.

9.5 **For approval:** The approval of the catering contract would be circulated for written agreement.

10 INSPIRE

10.1 There was no update to report.

11 SCHEME OF DELEGATION (previously issued)

11.1 Proposed for approval.

11.2 **For approval:** The approval of the Scheme of Delegation would be circulated for written agreement.

12 EDUCATION AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE REPORT

12.1 The Chair reported that the meeting included a detailed update on the behaviour and attitudes reviews across all schools in the Trust. The CEO confirmed that actions from the reviews would be followed through and then reviewed.

13 TRUSTEE BUSINESS

Recruitment

13.1 Following a recruitment process three trustee appointments would be proposed to Members for approval.

14 LGB BUSINESS

Matters from LGBs

14.1 There were no items raised.

LGB Appointments and Resignations (previously issued)

14.2 **For approval:** The approval of the governor appointment, with continuous service.

14.3 **For approval:** The approval of the Knavesmire LGB request to change the size of the LGB to 11 governors.

15 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (previously issued)

15.1 **For approval:** The approval of the 7th February 2025 minutes would be circulated for written agreement.

Matters Arising and Action Plan

15.2 There were no matters arising.

15.3 There were no actions to update.

16 POLICIES

16.1 Reserves Policy: The Reserves Policy would be carried over to the next meeting. **A Trustee suggested sharing the policy with Principals for feedback.** The CEO confirmed the policy reflects practice but was happy to share the policy with Principals before approval.

16.2 The CEO explained that there was a discussion to be had about providing clarity of any surplus reserve. A Trustee suggested having an upper level threshold to support investment into the schools. It was agreed to include on the next Finance, Audit and Risk Committee.

16.3 **For approval:** The approval of the below policies would be circulated for written agreement:

- Inspire Careers Policy
- Menopause Policy

- Wellbeing Policy
- Regular Visitors, Peris and Volunteers Protocol
- Governance Volunteer Expenses Policy
- Job Descriptions

16.4 **A Trustee asked if the number of policies was increasing.** The COO confirmed not in the case of HR policies, as some had been streamlined and combined where possible.

17 CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS

17.1 Items recorded as a separate confidential minute.

18 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

18.1 There were no items for discussion under AOB.

19 FUTURE MEETING DATES

Finance, Audit and Risk Committee – 23rd June 2025 10am
Trust Board – 30th June 2025 1pm (Scarcroft)
Education and Standards Committee – 8th July 2025 9.30am
Member – 11th July 2025 10am

The meeting closed at 11.20am.

Meeting Decisions – ratified by written resolution
Ian Wiggins appointed as Chair to July 2026.
Donna Smith appointed as Vice Chair to July 2026.
Approved Chair and Vice Chair Election Procedure.
Approved Job evaluation project.
Approved catering contract.
Approved Scheme of Delegation.
Approved governor appointment.
Approved Knavesmire LGB request to change the size of their LGB to 11.
Trustees approved the 7th February 2025 Minutes.
Approval of the below policies: - Inspire Careers Policy - Menopause Policy - Wellbeing Policy - Regular Visitors, Peris and Volunteers Protocol - Governance Volunteer Expenses Policy - Job Descriptions

Actions:

19th May 2025			
Item	**By**	**Action**	**Date**
		There were no actions.	

Approved at Trust Board on 4th July 2025.

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Trust Board Approval